

Calgary

Vaccine mandate ended for Alberta public servants, premier says

Jason Kenney said those working from home will return to work on a hybrid basis

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Speaking during a news conference in Calgary on Thursday, Premier Jason Kenney said the vaccine mandate for Alberta public servants has ended. (CBC News)

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Alberta public servants are no longer required to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 or provide regular negative test results.

Alberta Premier Jason Kenney confirmed the change during a press conference on Thursday. The change took effect March 1.

Alberta public service employees [previously had been](#) required to show proof of vaccination or provide negative test results. That requirement, implemented in September 2021, affected around 25,500 provincial employees.

Kenney said employees who have been working at home have been instructed to return to work on a hybrid basis.

"Their managers will work out opportunities for people to continue to work from home on a limited basis if it does not diminish productivity," Kenney said during a press conference.

"People have accommodated the work from home requirements for office work over much of the past two years. But we lose something in terms of team building, culture and probably productivity as well if everyone is permanently working from home."

Public service employees work in a variety of different roles to deliver services and support the functioning of the provincial government.

"I hope and expect as soon as possible that we'll see those government office towers back with productive public servants," Kenney said.

Bonnie Gostola, a vice-president with AUPE — the trade union that supports the public service employees — said the union was informed of the changes a few days before the decision was made to lift the restrictions.

"We do have an expectation that the government will follow through with its obligations under Occupational Health and Safety to assure that when our members do return to work, regardless of their vaccine status, that proper measures have been taken to protect them," Gostola said.

Alberta Health Services employees

Earlier this week, Kenney said a [COVID-19 vaccine mandate for health workers](#) should also be scrapped, and he reiterated that sentiment on Thursday.

"What we've asked for from AHS are options," Kenney said. "We'll be working with them to make a final decision over the days to come, and there will be a formal announcement on the final policy setting."

- [Premier calls for end to vaccine mandate for Alberta Health Services staff](#)

Kenney cited the waning effectiveness of vaccines and the increased transmissibility of the Omicron variant, saying there was "no measurable difference" of transmission of COVID-19 between vaccinated and unvaccinated workers.

Critics pushed back on the move, arguing that the policy provides protection for vulnerable patients in high-risk settings, even after they are no longer needed for the wider population.

"We're talking about health-care workers working with some of the most vulnerable patients in the province," Dr. Lynora Saxinger, an infectious diseases specialist and associate professor of microbiology and immunology at the University of Alberta, [previously told CBC News](#).

The mandatory vaccination policy for AHS went into effect on Dec. 13.

It applies to all AHS and Covenant Health staff, as well as workers at AHS subsidiaries, including Carewest, Capital Care and Alberta Precision Laboratories. That involves about 121,000 people.

With files from Helen Pike and Wallis Snowden

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